

# Suicide Prevention Strategies for La Crosse County



## A Recommendations Guide for Community Members and Decision-Makers

November 2025



LA CROSSE COUNTY  
Health Department  
Nationally Accredited

# Introduction and Background

Suicide is a serious public health issue that affects individuals, families, and communities worldwide. While its causes are complex and personal, suicides can be preventable. Recognizing warning signs and knowing how to respond can save lives.

There is no single cause or universal solution. Prevention requires a range of strategies and support systems across individuals, families, and communities. Collaboration among schools, healthcare providers, workplaces, and local organizations is essential. Using culturally relevant, evidence-based approaches strengthens community efforts and support for those at risk.

To address this need in the community, the La Crosse County Suicide Death Review Team (SDRT) was created. The SDRT brings together professionals from multiple sectors to review suicide deaths in the county, identify service gaps, and develop recommendations for prevention. One of the team's core activities includes conducting voluntary interviews with next of kin and gathers background information about the individual's life, circumstances, and interactions with support systems prior to their death. This information helps the team identify patterns, risk factors, and opportunities for intervention.

Families who have been interviewed by the SDRT often express appreciation for the team's work, noting that it honors the memory of their loved one while helping to protect others in crisis. By listening without judgment, meeting people where they are, and connecting insights to actionable recommendations, the SDRT works to improve local resources, influence policy where needed, and ultimately save lives.

This guide serves as both a practical resource for suicide prevention and a wrap-up of the SDRT's work. By fostering open conversations and providing clear, accessible information, the purpose of this guide is to help reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking, and strengthen the network of care for those in crisis, ensuring the team's legacy continues beyond its conclusion.



Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families and communities and has long-lasting effects.

Suicide is a death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die.

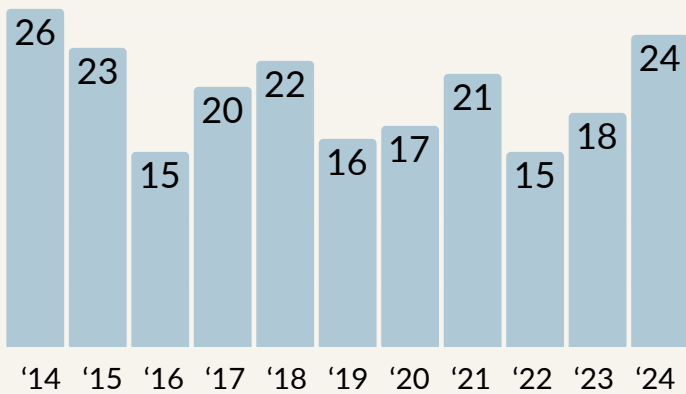
**This report includes data and information about people who have lost their lives from suicide within La Crosse County. Each data point within this report represents a member of our community lost to suicide. We continue to remember those we have lost and honor their lives.**

# Data Trends

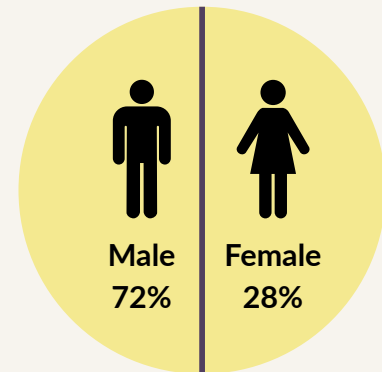
Below are some characteristics of people who have lost their lives to suicide in La Crosse County. Suicide can impact anyone—no matter their age, gender, background, or life circumstances. It is a complex problem that often develops over time and is shaped by many factors, including biology, mental health, relationships, environment, and society.

Understanding these characteristics can help us create prevention strategies that better support the people most at risk. The information in this section comes from the La Crosse County Medical Examiner's Office.

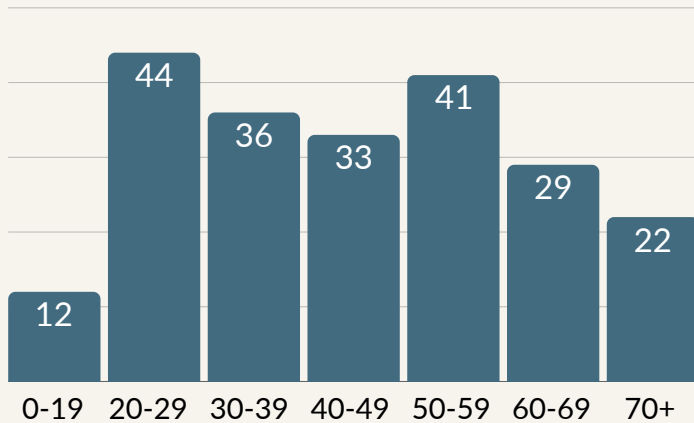
## How many lives were lost to suicide in the past decade?



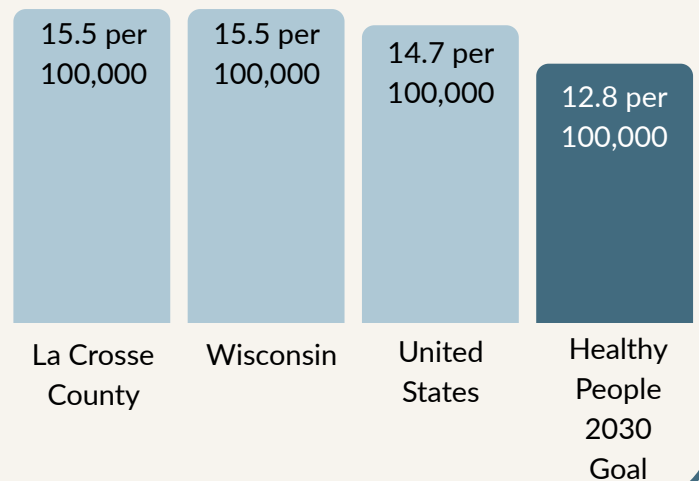
## Over the past ten years, deaths by suicide have occurred more often in males



## Deaths from suicide by age (2014-2024)



## How do we compare to state and national trends?



# Risk Factors

While the risk of suicide is not limited to any one group, certain characteristics may increase the likelihood of suicide, such as age, gender, and experiences. It is important to recognize that suicide, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and substance use are connected and can often increase the challenges someone may face.



Substance use



High conflict or violent relationships



Adverse Childhood Experiences



History of depression or other mental illnesses



Assault or other past traumatic events



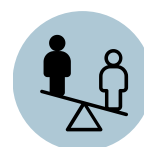
Previous suicide attempt



Financial hardship



Lack of access to healthcare



Discrimination

# Protective Factors

Despite these risks, there are also protective factors that can reduce the likelihood of suicide and support a person's well-being. Strengthening these protective factors—especially in families, schools, workplaces, and communities—can create supportive environments that promote mental health and help prevent suicide.



Effective coping skills



Reduced access to lethal means of suicide



Financial stability and support



Support from partners, friends, and family



Access to quality healthcare



Reasons for living (family, friends, pets, hobbies, etc.)



Feeling connected to community



Positive Childhood Experiences



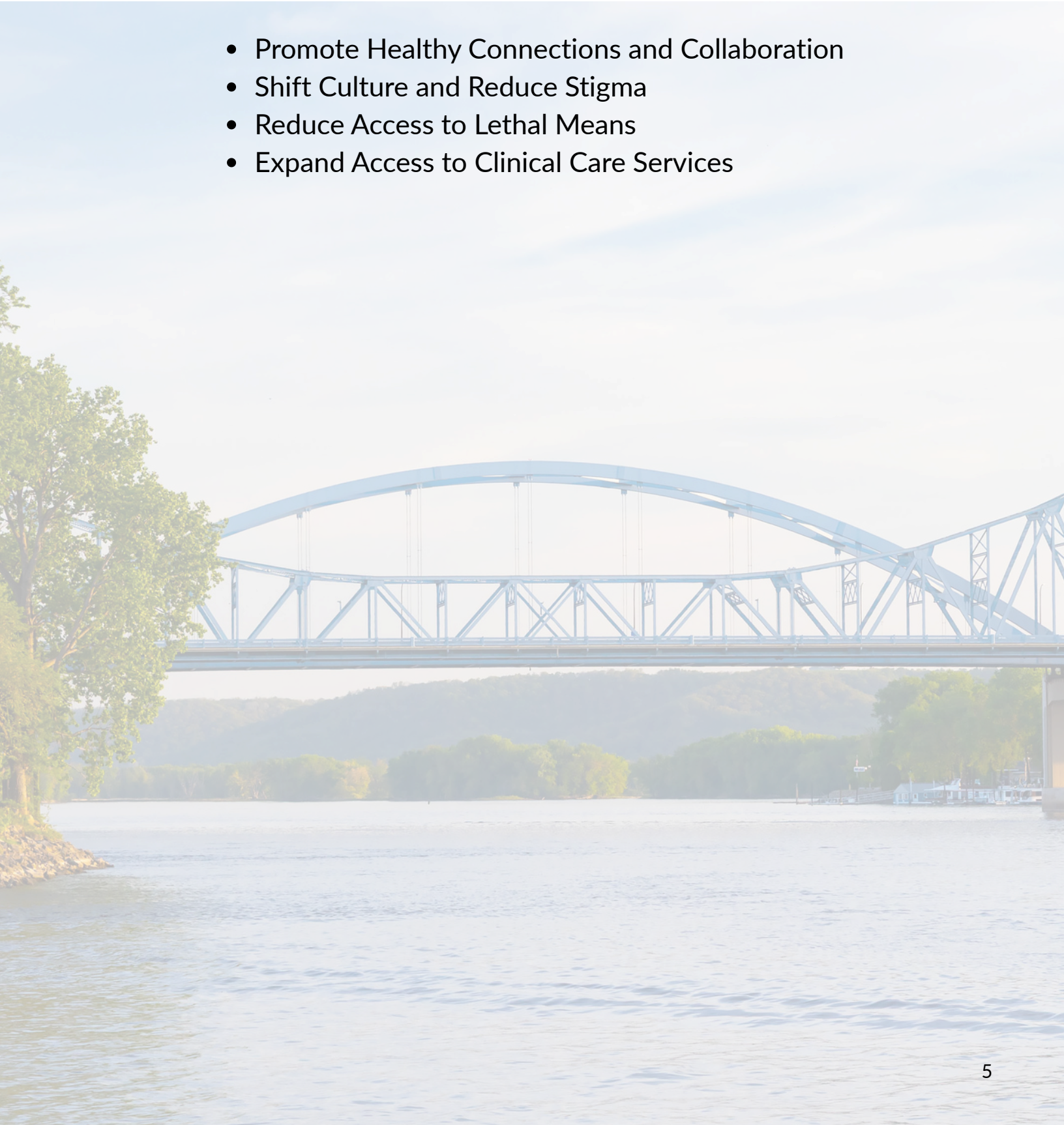
Community Safety

# Recommendations

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Based on findings from medical examiner reports, next of kin interviews, and research from local, state, and national sources, the following recommendations are offered to help prevent suicide in La Crosse County.

- Promote Healthy Connections and Collaboration
- Shift Culture and Reduce Stigma
- Reduce Access to Lethal Means
- Expand Access to Clinical Care Services



# Promote Healthy Connections and Collaboration

Strong relationships and coordinated systems create a safety net that can prevent suicide. Social isolation is a known risk factor, while positive relationships are among the strongest protective factors. Equipping trusted adults and building community partnerships creates early intervention pathways and long-term resilience.



## Train community gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are individuals in the community who may notice changes in behavior before a crisis occurs, such as teachers, coaches, hairstylists, bartenders, law enforcement officers, or spiritual leaders. Providing training in mental health first aid, suicide prevention, and referral processes **empowers these community members to recognize warning signs** and connect people to support early on.



## Foster opportunities for connections

Loneliness and isolation are major risk factors for suicide. By creating inclusive, welcoming spaces like peer support groups, community events, youth mentorship programs, or volunteer opportunities, **communities can help individuals build meaningful relationships**. Positive social ties serve as buffers during times of distress and contribute to overall mental wellness.



## Build sustainable partnerships

Suicide prevention is most effective when agencies and organizations work together. Schools, public health departments, hospitals, tribal and faith-based organizations, and individuals with lived experience must collaborate to share data, resources, and strategies. **A united approach ensures efforts are coordinated, inclusive, and have a lasting impact.**

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Reach out to someone who might be feeling isolated - a simple check-in can make a big difference.
- Join or support local efforts like community events, mentorship programs, or prevention coalitions.
- Take a mental health or gatekeeper training to learn how to support others and recognize warning signs early. Scan the QR code or [follow this link](#) for how to find a training/learn more information.



# Shift Culture and Reduce Stigma

Stigma is a key barrier for seeking help. Building a culture where mental health is openly discussed and supported can lead to earlier intervention and prevent crises from escalating.



## Normalize conversations about mental health

Mental health should be as **openly discussed as physical health**. Workplaces, schools, faith-based institutions, and recreational spaces are all ideal venues to start conversations. Encouraging staff training, regular check-ins, and visible support for mental health can help normalize care and reduce shame around seeking help.



## Community-based prevention programs

Implementing upstream strategies that build resilience in youth, such as social-emotional learning in K-12 schools, can help individuals navigate mental health struggles. Supporting parents and caregivers through education and community programs also **creates safe, stable, and nurturing environments that reduce adverse childhood experiences**.



## Supportive policies in everyday settings

Individuals can advocate for insurance coverage of mental health conditions and ensure mental wellness is embedded in public life. Examples include mental health resources at workplaces, school-based health centers, and signage promoting help-seeking behaviors at libraries, gyms, or places of worship. **Consistency across environments reinforces the message that mental health matters**.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Talk openly about mental health — share your experiences and encourage others to do the same.
- Challenge harmful language or assumptions about mental illness or suicide when you hear them.
- Display or share mental health resources (like 988) in your workplace, school, or social media to help normalize help-seeking.

## Four Ways to Reduce Mental Health Stigma

- ✓ Educate to dispel myths about mental health
- ✓ Encourage open, honest conversations
- ✓ Use, respectful stigma-free language (ex: avoid using derogatory terms like “crazy” or “psycho” to describe someone)
- ✓ Promote supportive policies and environments



# Reduce Access to Lethal Means

Limiting access to highly lethal means of suicide saves lives. Suicidal crises can be impulsive. Reducing access to firearms, medications, and other high-risk means gives people time to reconsider, seek help, or be reached by support systems.



## Promote safe storage of firearms and medications

Partner with law enforcement and pharmacies to distribute gun locks, medication lock boxes, and public messaging about secure storage.



## Expand medication take-back programs

Encourage participation in regular disposal events and use of community drop boxes to reduce access to unused or expired prescription medications. Educate on the importance of proper medication disposal.



## Install physical barriers at high risk-locations

Collaborate with urban planners, transportation authorities, and property owners to add barriers, signage, or surveillance at bridges, rooftops, and other high-risk locations.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Safely store firearms and medications using locks or secure cabinets
- Dispose of unused medications at local take back sites or events
- Speak up - share information about safe storage with friends and family

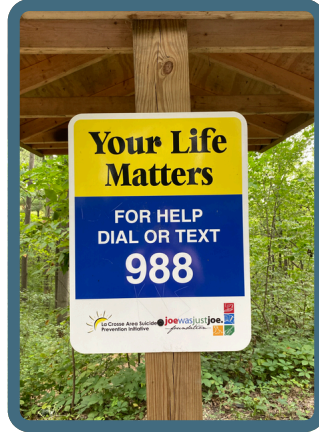
## Why this is important:

42% of deaths by suicide in La Crosse County in the past ten years have involved firearms



# Expand Access to Crisis Care Services

Everyone deserves timely, culturally responsive care during a mental health crisis. Increasing the visibility, reach, and quality of crisis services ensures no one falls through the cracks.



## Promote use of 988 and crisis response teams

Launch awareness campaigns in schools, public transit, workplaces, and healthcare systems. Ensure all populations know how and when to access these services.



## Ensure equitable access across communities

Translate materials, build trust with underrepresented groups, and ensure services meet the needs of rural, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ residents. Equity in access is key to reducing disparities in suicide rates.



## Expand peer support programs

Connect people in crisis with trained individuals who have lived experience. These relationships are rooted in empathy and can help guide individuals toward hope and recovery.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Talk openly about mental health — share your experiences and encourage others to do the same.
- Challenge harmful language or assumptions about mental illness or suicide when you hear them.
- Display or share mental health resources (like 988) in your workplace, school, or social media to help normalize help-seeking.

# Where can I find more information?

While this information can be overwhelming, there are ways everyone can get involved, learn more and support the work being done in this community. Together we can make a difference.



Information about the data in this report:

- [CDC Wonder](#)
- [Healthy People 2030](#)
- [La Crosse County Medical Examiner](#)



Connect with help:

- **Crisis:** 988 call/text or chat [online](#)
- **Information and Referral:** Great Rivers 211 (Dial 211)
- **La Crosse County Crisis Service:** 608.784.HELP (4357)
- **Drop-in center:** RAVE Recovery Avenue 608.785.9615 or walk in at 1806 State Street, La Crosse WI



Information about current initiatives in La Crosse County:

- [La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative](#)
- [Medication Disposal Locations](#)
- [La Crosse County Health Department Health Priorities](#)

Suicide can be preventable, and everyone can play a role. Reducing stigma, promoting connection, and limiting access to lethal means are crucial steps in protecting lives. By creating a community where people feel supported, valued, and safe asking for help, we can help prevent suicide and foster hope.